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AUTHOR Magallan, Rafael
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ABSTRACT

Although there has been unquestionable progress in developing a Hispanic presence in higher education during the last 20 years, the situation facing the Hispanic community today is one of actual deterioration in educational gains. In reviewing the educational status of this group, it becomes evident that the issue of Hispanic postsecondary education is tied to the conditions of elementary and secondary schooling for Hispanics. Many Hispanic children attend segregated schools. Low achievement and high attrition are serious problems. In addition, the curricular programs of Hispanic secondary school students reflect less college preparation or academic orientation than for any other racial/ethnic group. Thus, Hispanics lag far behind the general population with respect to the pool of college eligible and college ready students. These problems are all reflected by Hispanics' problems in postsecondary education--namely, limited access and high attrition. Those who are enrolled in postsecondary programs are concentrated disproportionately in two-year colleges. In addition, Hispanics are maldistributed among the nation's colleges and universities, with 72 schools accounting for nearly one-half of mainland Hispanic students. Finally, Hispanics are grossly underrepresented as faculty and administrators in postsecondary institutions. Appropriate responses to the unmet educational needs of Hispanic Americans must address economic, linguistic, and cultural factors. Hispanic organizations must collaborate with institutions of higher education in the dissemination of information and educational programs to the Hispanic community. (GC)

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THE STATUS OF HISPANICS IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION: A CHALLENGE FOR THE EDUCATION COMMUNITY

by

Rafael Magallan
Executive Director

Hispanic Higher Education Coalition
20 F Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20001
(202) 628-9600

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¿COMO ESTAMOS?

THE STATUS OF HISPANICS IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION: A CHALLENGE FOR THE EDUCATION COMMUNITY

The condition of Hispanic participation in postsecondary education is poor and continues to need critical attention. Though there has been unquestionable progress in the development of an Hispanic presence in higher education during the last 20 years, the situation facing the Hispanic community today is one of actual deterioration of Hispanic gains in education with the frightening prospect of even worse erosion in the immediate future. The issues confronting Hispanics in postsecondary education are serious and complex, calling for an extensive and rigorous analysis. Efforts needed to address these problems need to come soon from the federal, state and institutional levels in order to prevent foreclosure of the opportunity for a quality college education for another generation of Hispanics.

Background

Approximately 14.6 million persons in the continental United States are of Hispanic origin. In addition, there are 3.2 million more Hispanics in Puerto Rico who also hold U.S. citizenship. The overwhelming majority of Hispanics identify themselves as being Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central/South American or other Spanish origin. Over 60% of all U.S. Hispanics on the mainland are Mexican American or Chicano; about 14% are Puerto Rican; Cuban Americans comprise about six percent; other Central and South Americans are eight percent; and 12% other Spanish origin.

The 1980 Census shows that Hispanics are concentrated in the southwest, New York and Florida, but found in every state. California with its Hispanic population of 4.5 million accounts for 31% of all Hispanics in the states;

Texas with 2.9 million Hispanics accounts for 20% of all Hispanics; New York has 1.6 million and totals 11% of all Hispanics; and Florida with its .85 million accounts for nearly six percent of all U.S. Hispanics. Another 1.3 million Hispanics are in the Midwest. Hispanics constitute more than ten percent of the total population of five states: New Mexico (36.6%); Texas (21.0%); California (19.2%); Arizona (16.2%); and Colorado (11.7%).

Demographers note that Hispanics constitute the fastest growing group in the country; from 1970 to 1980, the Hispanic population increased by 61%. It is anticipated that this population will continue to grow more in the next few decades. Dr. Carlos Arce, a social scientist at the University of Michigan, succintly summarized that even if new immigration is reduced and if the Hispanic fertility rate, which is currently greater than other ethnic or racial groups in the U.S., declines, the Hispanic population will continue to expand faster than other groups as a direct result of the current Hispanic age structure: Hispanics are the youngest population group in the nation. The median age for Hispanics is 22 years versus more than 30 years for the non-Hispanic population and the proportion of the Hispanic population below age 18 is much larger (41.5%) than for non-Hispanics (28.3%) (Arce). Hispanics already represent a significant share of the school-age population. Although Hispanics constitute 6.4% of the total U.S. population, the account for nearly nine percent of the three to six-year cohort, and over 8.3% of the ten to 13-year old group. One can project the 18 to 19-year old Hispanic cohort in ten years (1992) to be 9.7%.

An additional demographic factor of some importance is the urban concentration of Hispanics. Eighty-one percent of Hispanics reside in metropolitan areas, compared to 66% non-Hispanics. The majority of Hispanics (51%) live in the central cities. This concentration in the central cities

means that the majority of Hispanic elementary and secondary students are enrolled in the mammoth and problem ridden school districts of large cities. Approximately 90% of Hispanic students are enrolled in public schools.

Condition of Education

In reviewing the educational status of Hispanic Americans it quickly becomes evident that the issue of Hispanic postsecondary education is tied to the poor plight of elementary and secondary schooling for Hispanics. The difficulties many Hispanic students face in both K-12 and higher education suggest the necessity of analyzing and improving the transition between the two systems.

A recent report by Dr. Gary Orfield of the University of Chicago underscored the continued increase of Hispanic student attendance in segregated schools. Hispanic children attended more segregated schools in 1980 than was even the case in 1966, when data indicated a high percentage of Hispanic students attended schools in which minority children were the majority of the student body. Nearly two-thirds of all Hispanics were enrolled in public schools in which 50% of the enrollment was minority.

Hispanics continue to be among the least educated in the United States; the median number of school years completed by Hispanics 25 years and over is 10.3 years, compared with 11.9 years for Blacks and 12.5 years for Whites. In regards to dropouts, defined as those persons not enrolled in school and not high school graduates, conservative estimates for Hispanic youth 16-24 years old show 33% have dropped out of high school as compared to 13% of White youth (Fratoe, 1981).

Attrition rates released tend to understate the extent of dropout (Olivas, 1982). The 1980 high school completion rate for Mexican Americans who were 25 years or older was 43.2% in comparison with 68.7% for Whites over

25. Those Hispanic students who did remain in school fell behind their classmates until approximately ten percent of the 8-to-13 year olds and 24% of the 14-20 year olds were enrolled two grades behind their classmates; only nine percent of White 14-24 year olds students were two years behind their age cohorts (Condition of Education for Hispanic Americans, 1980).

The Office for Civil Rights' 1980 Elementary and Secondary Schools Survey reported that Hispanics had the lowest graduate participation rate for all groups. There were 129,587 Hispanics reported receiving a regular high school diploma during the 1979-80 school year, for a graduate rate of 40.8 (as comapred to a 74.8 rate for White students). Although the number of Hispanic high school graduates on the mainland, ages 18-to-24 years old, increased from 1975 (832,000) to 1980 (1,054,000), Hispanic secondary school graduates as a percent of that Hispanic population (1,962,000) declined from 57.5% to 53.7% (Whites had a percent of 82.5 and Blacks 69.7 in 1980).

Not surprisingly the curricular programs of the Hispanic secondary school students reflect less of a college preparatory or academic orientation than for any other racial or ethnic group, except for American Indians. Unpublished tabulations from the High School and Beyond Study (1980) conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics show that only 26.2% of Hispanic seniors were enrolled in a curriculum appropriate for college preparation (as contrasted to 39.3% of White and 32.4% of Black seniors). Hispanic students were also disproportionately underenrolled in high school mathematics and science courses.

Hispanics continue to lag far behind the general population with respect to the pool of college eligible and college ready students.

The difficulties of school districts to address the needs of Hispanics students are reflected in postsecondary institutions, where to quote Dr. Michael Olivas, Director of the University of Houston's Institute for Higher

Education Law and Governance, "issues of limited access, discriminatory employment practices, and high attrition disproporticnately affect Hispanic students. Although there is a public perception that Hispanic enrollments have greatly increased in recent years, the reality is very different, for Hispanic students have neither attained access into a broad range of institutions nor dramatically increased their numbers throughout the system." For example, from 1970 to 1980 Hispanic full-time undergraduate students increased only from 2.1% of the total to 3.7%. Enrollment data for 1980 showed that Hispanics dropped to 3.5% of all full-time students in the U.S. Hispanics comprised 3.9% of total; full- and part-time undergraduate enrollment in the states and D.C. (compared to 81.3% White non-Hispanic). Furthermore, Hispanic college enrollment as a percent of Hispanic high school graduates declined from 35.4% to 29.9% from 1975-1980 and Hispanic college enrollment as a percent of the 18-24 years old Hispanic population fell from 20.4% in 1975 to 16.1% in 1980.

There were 17,164 Hispanics pursuing full-time graduate and professional degrees in 1980 for approximately 2.5% of the total. In addition, the fields in which Hispanics were enrolled continue to be severely limited. Fewer than 2.2% are to be found in the physical sciences and 3.0% in engineering.

The attrition rate of Hispanic college students is also far higher than that of the general college population. Fifty-seven percent of Hispanic males and 54% of Hispanic females fail to graduate as compared to 34% of both White males and females. It becomes obvious that Hispanic enrollments have not shown the growth one would have expected from efforts to increase minority student enrollments (Olivas, 1981).

In looking at where those few Hispanic students enroll a disturbing pattern emerges: Hispanic students are concentrated in two-year colleges.

In 1980, 36% of White students attended two-year colleges, while 54% of Hispanic students attended these institutions. The concentration of Hispanics in two-year colleges has created a major dilemma of matriculation. Hispanic students are not transferring from two-year colleges into four-year institutions in numbers adequate for the population involved. Whereas Hispanics constituted 5.7% of two-year college students, they made up only 2.9% of four-year college students in 1980. Recent research has questioned the equity of such a maldistribution and has suggested that Hispanic attrition is due, in large measure, to the funding patterns and practices that result in Hispanics having access primarily into two-year colleges (Olivas, 1977). This impression is borne out by degree award data for 1978-79 which indicate that while mainland Hispanics receive 4.2% of associate degrees, they receive only 2.2% of bachelor's degrees, 1.8% of master's degrees and a mere 1.3% of doctoral degrees. Master's and doctoral degree productions for Hispanics have declined 8.7% and 15.9% respectively between 1977 and 1979.

Another important pattern likewise emerges. Hispanic students are concentrated in a few score institutions. There are just 18 Hispanic majority colleges on the mainland, and of these only three were established with a specific intent to serve Hispanics. Applying a criteria which defines significant Hispanic enrollment as reflecting either over 2,000 Hispanic students or a 20% or higher Hispanic share of total institutional enrollment, only 72 institutions so defined can be found on the mainland. These 72 schools account for nearly one-half of all mainland Hispanic students.

In addition, Hispanics are grossly under-represented as faculty and administrators, and control few of the postsecondary institutions on the mainland. There are only three institutions governed by Hispanics majorities, compared to over 102 colleges and universities controlled by Blacks and

approximately 26 Indian controlled institutions. Few Hispanics serve as chief executive officers of institutions. There are approximately 24 of which only six are presidents of four-year institutions. Hispanics constitute about 2.7% of all employees in postsecondary institutions but make up only 1.4% of executive, administrative and managerial personnel and only 1.5% of faculty (Condition of Education for Hispanics, 1980).

Related factors such as the overall lower economic resources of Hispanics, the linguistic and cultural needs of Hispanic youth, lack of adequate academic counseling and college advisement services for Hispanics, lack of Hispanic elementary and secondary teachers, lack of Hispanic college faculty, as well as other important considerations must be taken into account in developing appropriate responses to the unmet educational needs of Hispanics.

Conclusively, it can be reiterated that the condition of Hispanic education is poor and continues to need serious review. Some researchers hold that the evidence strongly suggests that there is a system of structural discrimination present in American education which makes progressive educational movement for Hispanics very difficult to develop or prosper. Drs. Padilla, Arce and Olivas have suggested that the best possibility for independent transformational patterns to develop would lie in an historically Hispanic institution, of which only three exist in the mainland U.S., or in community-based organizations and alternative schools. Such alternatives to mainstream institutions and school systems would be analogous to tribally-controlled community colleges for American Indians. Another example of an alternative is the quasi-academic units such as research or training divisions in Hispanic community-based organizations.

A second approach suggested is one that links Hispanic scholars across

institutional or disciplinary lines. Examples include the Chicano Research Network (affiliated with the National Chicano Council on Higher Education), the Special Interest Group on Hispanic Research of the American Educational Research Association, or similar collaborative exchange mechanisms. The emphasis is one of intellectual and professional self-development and solidarity with other Hispanic faculty and researchers. Activities here can revolve around visiting term appointments, professional meetings, or other informal means.

A SHORT-TERM STRATEGY FOR COLLABORATION

Lacking the institutional base seen as essential for meaningful long-term education progress, Hispanics have sought to develop strategies which can serve the postsecondary educations needs of the Hispanic community, albeit on a short-term basis. One of the approaches proffered is of making available to IHE's the services of community-based organizations existent in Hispanic communities. In many cases, Hispanic CBO's have been operational for over fifty years; and the bulk of CBO programs have been functioning for nearly a decade. Among these CBO's the largest and best known are the following:

1) LULAC, The League of United Latin American Citizens
2) G.I. Forum
3) ASPIRA
4) National Council of La Raza
5) MALDEF
6) PRLDEF
7) SALAD
8) UNO, and many others

A variety of educational expertise can be shared through extended interface between IHE's and CBO's. For example some of the CBO's have been funded to conduct innovative projects: a law school admissions study (MALDEF) and a financial aid workshop project (LULAC Educational Service Centers). ASPIRA has had NIE and Ford Foundation funds to establish a research and dissemination capacity in its old Washington office. MALDEF and PRLDEF are civil rights law firms with legal expertise in school finance, bilingual education, and other

educational issues concerning Hispanics. The National Council of La Raza, is a national advocacy organization with affiliate organizations and particular emphasis upon Hispanic employment, social conditions, and migrant education. The LULAC Educational Service Centers are the largest Talent Search in the country, with 12 counseling centers in predominantly-Hispanic areas to assist Hispanic high school students with college information and financial aid assistance.

These organizations also channel financial resources back into communities, as INESC, ASPIRA, MALDEF, and the National Council administer scholarship funds, fellowship programs, research assistantships, or internships. A number of students who receive support from these programs help constitute the limited Hispanic enrollment attending college. Thus, information on these resource programs and other national-level programs is sure to be improved through the networking and interface between IHE's and CBO's. Members of the CBO's have the experience, if not the additional resources, to undertake this IHE activity, but expansion to institutions has been unsuccessful because of the extraordinary resources necessary to maintain the national advocacy efforts. The staff contributions of time and expenses have begun to take their toll on other advocacy activities, and expansion to the necessary IHE activities will require more resources.

POSSIBLE AREAS OF JOINT COLLABORATION

1. Establishment of on-going channels of communications between IHE's and the principal organizational entities in the Hispanic community.
2. Improved dissemination of information to Hispanic communities by IHE's via utilization of newsletters and publications of local Hispanic community-based organizations.
3. Development of joint programming in the areas of Hispanic student exposure and orientation to postsecondary education opportunities.

4. Development of improved joint-efforts in the raising of scholarship funds.

CONCLUSION

In testimony delivered recently before the first Congressional hearing specific to the concerns of Hispanics in Higher Education, Dr. Arturo Madrid, former director of the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, noted that the issues of access and equity involved are not a matter solely of the well being of one sector of the population but rather concerns the general public interest. "Given the growth rate of the Hispanic population its presence will be increasingly felt," Dr. Madrid testified, adding that it therefore behooves America's planners and policy makers to attend to the educational needs of this community.

The need for additional analysis of this issue with appropriate resultant action is in order. Much work needs to be done to increase the quality and quantity of Hispanic secondary school graduates. Intervention efforts at an early stage are necessary to correct the dangerous under-enrollment problem. Improved teacher training, targeted efforts for dropout prevention, and a realistic orientation toward academic and college preparatory programs are necessary at the prepostsecondary level. At the postsecondary tier, more attention must be placed on retention of those few students who enroll, on the transition of Hispanics from two-year to four-year institutions, increased support for Hispanics at the graduate level, and careful and judicious development of Hispanic faculty and administrators.

The higher education community will be confronted with this challenge for many years. Only by a concerted focus on the overall problem of substandard education for this growing segment of our society can the challenge be fully met. The responsibility for articulating and resolving this critical issue

rest with all who are concerned with issues of full educational access and equity.

Rafael J. Magallan
Hispanic Higher Education Coalition

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